





Streetcars pass the bull-nosed safety islands in front of the Great Northern station at the foot of Hennepin Avenue. Fred Rhodes got off here to board a train to St. Paul as part of an in-town circle trip.

**Twin City Lines is published
quarterly by the
Minnesota Streetcar Museum**

P. O. Box 16509
Minneapolis, MN 55416

www.trolleyride.org
Vol. 16 No. 3

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Twin City Lines is published quarterly and is mailed to members in good standing without charge under Third Class postal permit.

The Minnesota Streetcar Museum operates the Como-Harriet Streetcar Line in Minneapolis and the Excelsior Streetcar Line in Excelsior. Its mission is to preserve Minnesota's electric railway heritage.

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***Fred Rhodes remembers
the streetcars***

-Fred Rhodes

Long-time Minnesota Streetcar Museum member Fred Rhodes started volunteering as an operator in 1977. He was also the Minnegazette editor from 1979 to 1985.

The following is a collection of my streetcar memories. I've been a big railfan since I was seven years old, thanks in part to my father, Paul Rhodes, a railfan in his own right. It's time to get these memories in print so future generations can enjoy the original rail transportation in the Twin Cities. The following events are in chronological order the best that I can recall.

Long Streetcar Waits

As much as we loved the streetcars, it would be frustrating to wait for them to show up, especially in inclement weather. The long wait seemed to be most often at Lake and Bloomington on our way home after we alighted from a Selby-Lake car. Without an electronic message board, we had no idea when the next Bloomington-Columbia Heights car would arrive. Luckily, we could wait in the Keller Drug Store until it showed up. When the streetcar finally showed up, it seemed to be followed immediately by a second car. To which my mother would remark: "After making us wait that long, they're afraid to come alone!"

First Days of the Streetcar

My recollections date from August 1945, when we moved to Minneapolis from Detroit, Michigan at age 7, to June 1954, at age 16, when streetcar opera-

tions ceased in the Twin Cities.

I was born in Detroit and lived there until our family moved to Minneapolis in the waning days of World War II. My father worked for a munitions factory in Detroit throughout the war. As the war drew to an end, he lost his job. My parents decided to move back to Minnesota where my mother was born and raised. Having been raised in New York City, my father learned the necessity and value of getting around the big city by railroad, commuter train, subway and streetcar.

When we moved to Minneapolis, my father insisted that we live on or near a streetcar line, mainly because we wouldn't own a car for a while. Money was tight and we were destined to go everywhere—to work, school, shopping and church—by public transit. In 1945, that was exclusively by streetcar.

We found a lovely two-story home at 4351 Bloomington Avenue, on the northeast corner of E. 44th Street and Bloomington in south Minneapolis, which would be my parents' home for the next 41 years (they moved out in 1986). The home was located on the Bloomington-Columbia Heights streetcar line. Being on a car stop corner, it was convenient to board or alight the streetcar directly out our front door. Especially if we were late getting out the door to catch the streetcar.

We would go out on the front sidewalk and look south for the large yellow "golden glow" headlight, which we could see as far as five blocks away (49th St.) and time our short scoot across 44th Street to the car stop.

The Bloomington-Columbia Heights was a quiet little streetcar line, with 15-minute service utilizing standard 1-man/2-man cars, but good enough to

get us anywhere in a timely manner. It was quiet because the parallel and much busier Chicago-Penn-Fremont streetcar line was just seven short blocks to the west. It was also quiet because several blocks in the area were still vacant, particularly between Bloomington and Cedar Avenues and 40th and 46th Streets. By 1950 houses filled the land.

I was thrilled to have moved here. I don't recall seeing streetcars in Detroit when we lived there, but then we didn't live near a streetcar line. These streetcars would be a big part of our life for the next eight years, until abandonment of the Bloomington-Columbia Heights streetcar line in 1953.

Both of my parents had jobs in downtown Minneapolis and rode the streetcars daily until we bought a car a few months after moving here. However, we continued to use the streetcar when their work schedules didn't mesh. At least once a week, they both worked downtown until about 9 p.m.

On those days, I would take the streetcar downtown after school, eat supper at the Forum Cafeteria and see a movie on Hennepin Ave. (at the State, Lyric, Gopher, RKO Orpheum, RKO Pan Theater (now renamed back to its original name, Pantages) or Radio City Theater at 9th & LaSalle. Then I would meet my parents for a ride home. Occasionally I would also ride the streetcar back home at 9 p.m. I was always amazed at how the motorman would call out street names (34th, 35th, 36th, etc.) in the dark. How could he see the street signs in the dark?!

Our church, Holy Name, was located at E. 37th St. and 11th Ave. S. in the Powderhorn Park neighborhood. We

Front cover: This issue features the streetcar memories of longtime MSM member Fred Rhodes. He lived on the Bloomington Avenue line and frequently visited the corner of Lake and Bloomington, seen here. Kenneth Magnuson photo.

took the streetcar to church, but the Sunday streetcar service was more infrequent, so we often walked the seven long blocks and five short blocks to and from church while looking for the streetcar that would never come, it seemed.

My first memories of the streetcars were shortly after we moved into our house in 1945. As an excited seven-year-old, I remember running to the front window every time I heard a streetcar coming and watching these huge yellow cars go rumbling by. I had never seen such a thing! Even after dark, the streetcars were all lit up impressively. What a sight, right in front of our house!

The destination signs always read Bloomington-Columbia Heights. Late in the day, I would see a strange destination sign that read: East Mpls. Station and asked my dad what that was all about. He told me that was an extra streetcar that was returning to the car barn near downtown Minneapolis after rush hour. I learned later that our line was served by both the East Side and Nicollet Stations.

Long Streetcar Rides

We got to ride these amazing, railed vehicles all over the city. My mother's relatives lived in north Minneapolis and Robbinsdale and getting there was an adventure in itself. Both locations were reached riding either the Chicago-Penn or Chicago-Fremont streetcar lines.

We would ride the Chicago-Fremont streetcar line directly to one set of relatives who lived at 44th and Morgan Aves. N. We would ride the other Chicago line, the Chicago-Penn streetcar line to the other set of relatives who lived at 40th and Beard Aves. N. in Robbinsdale. We got off the streetcar at 40th and Thomas Aves. N. and walked

the few short blocks west to Beard. Those would, in fact, be the longest streetcar rides we ever made.

First, we had to transfer from the Bloomington-Columbia Heights streetcar to the Chicago-Penn or Chicago-Fremont streetcar. We had two ways to do this. We could transfer just once by riding the Bloomington-Columbia Heights car to 6th Street and Chicago Ave. (sometimes called 8th Ave. S. at this point) on the south edge of downtown to catch either the Penn or Fremont car. In fact, we referred to that intersection as "6th & 8th" in those days. Chicago and 8th were the same street.

The two streetcar lines met only at this intersection. Oddly the tracks never crossed. Rather, they turned away from each other, each making a turn from one street to the other. The intersection also was rather desolate, and we didn't feel comfortable there. Today, U.S. Bank Stadium occupies that intersection.

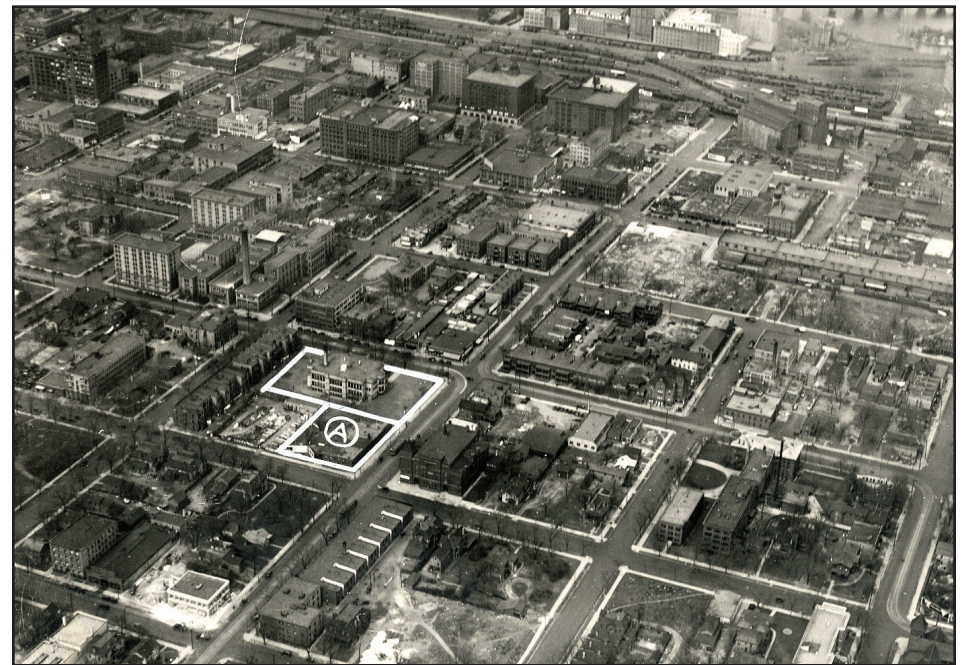
The other option required two transfers—at Lake Street and then at Chicago Avenue—which we preferred since it was busier. We never had to wait long for a streetcar either, as the Selby-Lake and Chicago-Penn-Fremont lines had frequent service. The east-west Selby-Lake streetcar line crossed all the Minneapolis north-south streetcar lines within a relatively short distance so boarding and alighting was constant. The line was almost always served by two-man gate cars to handle the unending traffic.

I remember the Selby-Lake streetcars as always being crowded. It seems like we always had to stand for the seven-block ride from Bloomington Ave. to Chicago Ave. Actually, I don't think I ever sat on a Selby-Lake streetcar. We hung out on the back platform in the open air coming through the gates.



Above: The corner of 39th and Thomas Avenue N. on the Chicago-Penn line, a block from where Fred got off to visit his Robbinsdale relatives. Norton & Peel photo, Minnesota Historical Society collection.

Below: In this 1928 aerial taken for the Minneapolis School Board, note the intersection of 6th and Chicago next to the school marked "A". The tracks of the Bloomington and Chicago lines turn at the corner but never cross one another. J. E. Quigley photo.



With the heavy crowds and interior lights in the side posts instead of the ceiling, the gate cars seemed darker than the standard 1-man/2-man cars. It was also a noisy ride what with all the clattering of steel wheels crossing other streetcar line tracks and switches seemingly every four to six blocks. But I loved the sound!

Schools and Streetcars

I attended 3rd through 6th grades at Northrop Elementary School at E. 46th St. and 16th Ave. S. (one block east of Bloomington) from 1945 through 1949. It was only a three-block walk from our house, so I never needed to ride the streetcar there or back. I would just watch them rumble by on my way to/from school. Somewhere during these young years in my life, I decided that I wanted to be a streetcar motorman when I grew up. Unfortunately, the streetcars were gone by the time I was 16.

One of my transit-related recollections from grade school was seeing the short-lived (1947-50) east-west 50th Street bus line in operation. This crosstown line connected all the north-south streetcar lines across south Minneapolis, similar to the 38th Street bus line, 12 blocks north. The line used the older Mack buses. Because of the parallel Minnehaha Parkway meandering between 48th and 49th streets nearby, the bus couldn't run its route entirely on 50th St. Instead, from Nicollet to Cedar Aves., it ran on 47th St. along the southern edge of Northrop school and the playground where we had recess.

I was a patrol boy at Northrop in 5th and 6th grades. The Minneapolis school patrol kids were rewarded with a picnic at Minnehaha Park at the end of the school year. More than 4,000 patrol boys and girls from Minneapolis and suburban Hennepin

County marched in a parade downtown on Nicollet Ave., grouped by school along with high school bands and attended by the mayor and other dignitaries. We paraded north from the Minneapolis Auditorium via Nicollet to the Milwaukee Road Depot at Washington Ave. For both school patrol picnics in May 1948 and 1949, the students boarded a Milwaukee Road "Hiawatha" passenger train for the ride to Minnehaha Park, disembarking at the "Princess" Minnehaha Depot. That was more fun than the picnic itself! The newspaper noted that this was probably the first train ride for many of the students. TCRT arranged for chartered streetcars to take the students back home after the picnic.

Streetcar/Motorcycle Accident

On July 1, 1946, when I was 8 years old, I witnessed a serious streetcar/motorcycle accident right in front of my house. At dusk, a motorcycle came up the steep hill (westbound) on 44th St., ran the Bloomington Ave. stop sign and continued directly into the front doors of a northbound streetcar. The cyclist suffered serious injuries but survived. His passenger suffered lesser injuries. A medic from General Hospital arrived and applied first aid. A Minneapolis Morning Tribune photographer took pictures of the victim and the reaction of the crowd (including me) that gathered which appeared on the front page of the newspaper the next day.

I attended 7th through 9th grades at Folwell Junior High School at E. 36th St. and 20th Ave. S. from 1949 through 1952. This school required a walk of more than a mile and worse, had no direct transit line to it. I could get there by riding the Bloomington-Columbia Heights streetcar and 38th Street bus line, but seldom did that, because it

was an undependable transfer point. School buses were virtually nonexistent in those days.

I attended 10th through 12th grades at Roosevelt High School at E. 40th St. and 28th Ave. S. from 1952 through 1955. The abandonment of the streetcar system took place during this timeframe. The streetcar line that ran past Roosevelt, the 28th Ave. S.-Robbinsdale line, had already been converted to buses by the time I started at the school in the fall of 1952. Like Folwell Junior High, it was a long hike to school, about 1 1/2 miles.

With no school buses available, my friends and I either walked, hitchhiked or rode the 34th Ave. S.-N. Washington streetcar to school. That meant walking from 44th and Bloomington to 42nd and Cedar where we caught the streetcar or thumbed a ride. We would ride the streetcar eastbound on 42nd St. from Cedar to 28th Aves., a distance of about 10 short blocks. When we hitch-hiked, often the same driver picked us up for the ride

to 28th Ave.

The 34th Ave. S.-N. Washington line ran a few lightweight cars mixed in with the standard cars. These cars, numbered 2000 through 2030, were the only ones I saw on this side of town. They never ran on the Bloomington-Columbia Heights line. I remember riding a lightweight on a rare occasion. They were certainly a different breed of streetcar.

Although the same size as a standard streetcar, the smaller motors gave off a different sound as the car started and stopped. The interior of the car seemed brighter without the clerestory. The rounded ceiling also gave it a more spacious look. This option didn't last long. The 34th Ave. S.-N. Washington line was abandoned on April 10, 1953, just two months after the abandonment of the Bloomington-Columbia Heights line.

Cataloguing the Streetcars

When I was sick and couldn't go to school, I would lay on the couch in the



A lightweight car on the 34th Avenue line at 49th Street.

front of the house and watch the streetcars go by all day. I wrote the number of each streetcar down as they passed my house every 15 minutes. After two hours, the streetcar numbers started repeating. My 5th grade math told me that our streetcar line was being serviced by a total of eight streetcars.

One number I remember seeing was car No. 1534, because it was our house number in reverse. I don't recall seeing car 1300 on our line, but the Bloomington-Col. Hts. destination signs are on car 1300. As the evening rush hour approached, new streetcar numbers appeared in greater frequency.

As a quiet little line, service on the Bloomington-Columbia Heights was provided exclusively by the standard 1-man/2-man streetcars with doors front and rear. Seeing a gate car on our line was a rare event. I saw gate cars only during an occasional rush hour trip. When this happened, I would wait for the gate car to return from its 54th St. terminus to see it again.

The one thing that still stands out to me is the condition of these beautiful streetcars in the early days of my life in Minneapolis. The streetcars were

repainted every few years, top to bottom, and looked like new when they were put back out on the street. The steel-sided cars, especially, shined like a new automobile, with their highly reflectorized gloss paint job. Even the running gear was repainted.

The repainting and general restoration stopped around 1950 when new management took over. In the streetcars' last years, they really looked shabby and scruffy, especially compared to the new GM buses that were replacing them. Almost every streetcar bore scratches, dents and damaged or missing wainscoting. I'm not even sure they were washed. It was not a fitting ending to these magnificent streetcars.

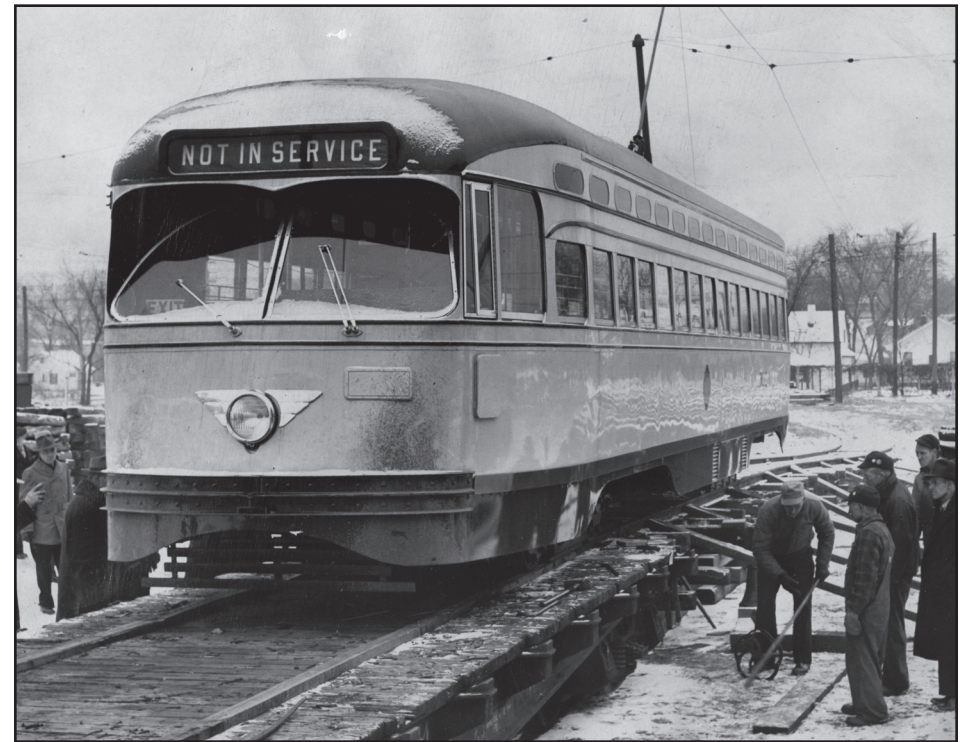
Arrival of the PCCs

When the PCC streetcars arrived on the scene in 1947, our line received a good share of them. During the peak of PCC service, the Bloomington-Columbia Heights line saw roughly a 50/50 split between standard and PCC cars. At the time the term, "PCC," was foreign to us so we just called the streetcar types "old" and "new."

The PCC cars were such a hit that



Car 1534 (Fred's house number in reverse) on the Minnehaha-Fort Snelling line, just east of the Washington Avenue viaduct. Norman Rolfe photo.



Car 300, the first of the 140 all-electric PCCs, arrives at Snelling Shops. Star-Tribune photo, Minnesota Historical Society collection.

people (myself included) would time their trips so that they could ride one. Yes, there was a time where I would pass up a ride on an old streetcar to ride a PCC! They were especially a beautiful sight at night. My childhood friends and I would stare as a PCC car would silently zip along Bloomington Ave. with its bright interior lights lighting up the street. Lights shining through the green standee windows also added to beauty of these cars.

I even had my favorite seats on the streetcars. On the old streetcars I liked to sit on the first cross seat on the right side for maximum visibility. I didn't like looking through the screens on the left side of the car. Sometimes I would sit in the longitudinal seat directly behind the motorman and watch him pilot the streetcar and get his view of the surroundings. I also liked to stand on the back platform and watch the

trolley pole rope roll into and out of the retriever. On the PCC's, I preferred to sit on one of the single seats, which only were on the right side.

The "Open" Lake Street Bridge

My most perilous streetcar ride was in 1950 when the Lake Street Bridge across the Mississippi River was being resurfaced. All traffic was suspended during the resurfacing, of course, except for the Selby-Lake streetcars which could continue riding the rails. I made at least one crossing on the bridge during that reconstruction. Almost all decking had been removed. I remember looking out the open window straight down through the few remaining skinny steel beams into the flowing waters of the Mighty Mississippi. Unreal.



Redecking the Lake Street bridge. St. Paul Pioneer Press photo, Minnesota Historical Society collection.

Joyriding on the Bloomington-Columbia Heights Line

My curiosity of the Bloomington-Columbia Heights streetcar line finally got to me. After all these years, I decided to ride the entire length of the line to see where it went. One quiet summer day during school vacation, I got on the streetcar in front of my house on 44th St. to ride it roundtrip to Columbia Heights and back. Columbia Heights was a part of the city where we never traveled. Our relatives lived in north Minneapolis and Robbinsdale.

The line followed Bloomington Ave. northbound to its end at E. Franklin Ave. then veered west on Franklin for a block to 15th Ave. S. and then north into the edge of downtown. The line skirted the south and east side of

downtown and then across the 3rd Avenue Bridge to busy Central Ave. NE., which reminded me of Lake Street. The line continued north on Central past the Shoreham Railroad Yards, where several steam engines were still operating.

The line crossed the Minneapolis Filtration Plant Railway single track at 37th Ave. NE. and into Columbia Heights. At 40th Ave. NE., the line turned west and ended a few blocks later at 5th St. NE. in a residential area of Columbia Heights. Normally, the motorman is supposed to collect another fare for the southbound trip. Knowing I was joyriding, he didn't charge me for the return trip. (It would have cost me an extra 15 cents at the time.)

To get the full ride of the line on the way back home, I rode the streetcar

past my house on 44th St. another 10 blocks to the end of the line at 54th and Bloomington. Again, the motorman was supposed to collect another fare for the northbound ride but didn't. I got off at 44th St. after the two-hour joyride. In retrospect I wish I had done this fun ride more often!

Rough Streetcar Ride

My friends and I enjoyed one particular part of the Bloomington line; the two-block section between 40th and 42nd Streets. This part of Bloomington Ave. is low and built atop a peat bog, we heard. As such, the tracks sunk and shifted in this area and became uneven over time. Motormen took this section of track slowly, but not all of them.

If we were lucky, we had a bold motorman who wanted to keep his schedule and speed limit. We would stand on the back platform without holding on and try to stay on our feet as the car swayed back and forth through this stretch of track and avoid being thrown against the wall or into the stairwell.

Fare box caps

In our early days riding the streetcars, there were round metal caps on top of the fare boxes with several raised slots for coins and tokens. It was a slow process to feed the fare box with lots of coins with some hitting the floor. At some point the caps were removed and we simply dropped the coins and tokens into the box.

Parkway Theater at 48th and Chicago

The big thing in our neighborhood was when a bunch of us kids would take the long hike from 44th and Bloomington to the Parkway Theatre at 48th and Chicago each Saturday afternoon to see the kids' matinee at 2 p.m. Saturday matinees showed old

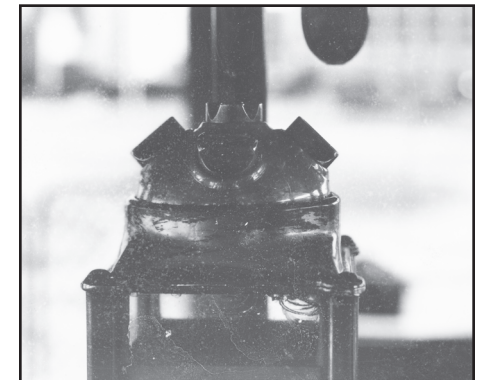
cowboy movies, cartoons, Three Stooges comedies and the like instead of the standard evening fare of MGM musicals and dramas.

We'd walk west on 44th or 46th Streets bordering St. Mary's Cemetery (or, if we brave enough, through the cemetery) to get to Chicago Ave., or walk on 48th Street. I would gaze at the Chicago-Penn or Chicago-Fremont gate cars that ran on this busy double-route line. It was neat seeing a different streetcar line.

Having Fun with the Streetcars

One of the most fun things about living on a streetcar line was putting items on the tracks. I did that for many years, from coins, to bottle caps, rocks and toy pistol caps. I loved to see the flattened-out pennies, nickels, dimes and, if I could afford it, even a quarter.

The most fun thing of all were the explosive caps from my cap pistol that I used to play cowboys with our neighbor kids. Instead of using a toy pistol to explode the cap, why not use a streetcar wheel?! Of course, the more caps you put on the rail, the louder the bang! I put 5, 10, 20 caps or even a full roll of 50 caps on the rail. The sound of 50 caps exploding at once was similar to the sound of a firecracker!



A domed fare box cap.

I had to tape the caps to the rail to keep them from blowing off by car traffic before the streetcar came. I taped the caps to the rail ahead of where the streetcar would stop. That way, the car wheel would hit the caps slowly as it started up after dropping off passengers. The bang really sounded loud if the streetcar was the quiet running PCC!

More often than not, the motorman would slam on the brakes and get out of the car to look around and inspect the noise. Us kids hid behind a house or bush to watch the action, hoping not to be seen. When the buses came, that fun disappeared.

Another fun observance was when there was a freezing rain. The trolley wheel jumped constantly as it navigated the icicles hanging from the wire, causing arcing and incredible flashing. The sight after dark was especially fascinating!

State Fair Streetcars

Our family enjoyed going to the State Fair each year. We usually drove there, but also took the streetcar some years. If we were lucky, we'd catch a Fair Grounds special nonstop streetcar right in front of our house! Most, if not all, streetcar lines ran Fair Grounds specials during the state fair that would take them directly from their specific streetcar line to the fairgrounds. Otherwise, we'd have to transfer twice to get to the state fair via the Selby-Lake and Como-Harriet streetcars. In the large streetcar yards at the fairgrounds, I always noticed a streetcar that looked different from all the others sitting off on its own siding.

It was car 1136, the lowest numbered car (re: oldest) that I had ever seen. The oldest car in operation at the end of streetcar service in 1954 was car 1166. Differences on car 1136 that I noticed were that it had only double

gates at the rear, not the triple gates found on all other streetcars. Most of the fleet was originally built with double gates only. See car 1136 on Page 23.

Mainly, I noticed the "service" door at the front of the car instead of the narrow set of moss green passenger exit doors you would find on a regular front exit gate car. It looked like a standard door you would find on the side of a garage. In reality, it was the motorman's door that only the motorman used to enter/alight the car. Passengers used only the rear gates.

What I didn't know was that this car was a rarity – the only car still in the fleet that had never been altered since the day it was built in 1905. All other cars had been rebuilt over the years with triple gates, front exit doors, standard double-stream doors for 1-

A streetcar turns off Como Avenue into the State Fair loop. Bob Schumacher photo.



man/2-man operation, steel siding, electric heaters, etc. What an ideal car this would have been if it could have been saved!

I noticed people sitting in the car in an office setting. I learned that this was the State Fair office car or "money" car where cash and receipts were totaled each day. Car 1136 served this annual purpose only, after it was removed from regular service in 1936. As I recall, after conversion of the streetcar system, an old Mack bus served the same purpose.

A Combined Streetcar and Train Trip Around the Twin Cities

My most vivid rail trip was the day my parents took my sister and I on a

streetcar and train ride round trip from our house to downtown Minneapolis and St. Paul and return. We boarded our standard 1-man/2-man car at 44th St. and rode it up to Lake Street. We transferred from our quiet streetcar to an always crowded Selby-Lake gate car for the trip west to Hennepin Ave. The bustling cars were always packed despite 5-minute service. The endless string of gate cars in both directions on Lake Street is burned into my memory.

Boarding through the rear gates and alighting through the narrow single-stream front doors of a gate car was opposite the procedure on the Bloomington-Columbia Heights car as well. Once aboard, we often had to split up or stand until the Selby-Lake

car reached the next streetcar line crossing, the Chicago line, seven short blocks west, where another transfusion of passengers would take place between two very busy lines.

This scene would be repeated as we crossed the Glenwood-4th Avenue, Nicollet-2nd St. NE, Grand-Monroe and Bryant-Johnson lines, clattering across a multitude of crossovers and switches enroute until we reached the end of the Selby-Lake line at Girard Ave. A noisy ride, but music to my ears. Hundreds of people must have gotten on and off that car in that 2 1/2-mile stretch..

We walked that short half block to Hennepin Ave. where we transferred to an incoming Como-Harriet, car, often another gate car, for the trip downtown. Our ride ended at the Great Northern Station at 1st & Hennepin.

A Switch to 'Heavy Rail'

Enough passenger trains were running in late 1940s so that one could

catch a train to St. Paul without too long a wait regardless of when one arrived. We bought our tickets for the 10-mile train ride for some incredibly low fare of 30 cents each or so which made it comparable with TCRT's streetcar fare of 12 cents (another 12 cents was collected when you alighted after crossing the city limits).

Of course, the railroad coaches were quite plush compared to the wicker rattan seats of the streetcars. Many workers commuted between downtowns on a regular basis for these and other reasons (quieter ride, express service, etc.). There was some complaining from TCRT at the time that the railroads were stealing passengers away from their streetcars on these interurban trips.

After a comfortable ride, although not especially scenic, through industrial east Minneapolis, we crossed the Mississippi River and through more industrial areas of St. Paul. We got off the train at Union Depot in downtown St. Paul. We went out of the depot and

caught our old friend, the Selby-Lake streetcar, for our return trip to Minneapolis.

Back to 'Light Rail'

This also was an interesting segment of the Selby-Lake line as it went up and down steep hills and through the famous Selby Tunnel. The motorman snapped on all the lights for our short "night ride" through the tunnel.

We crossed another multitude of St. Paul streetcar lines as we headed west on East 4th Street and then Selby Ave.: Rioce-South St. Paul, Hamline-Cherokee, Rondo-Stryker, St. Clair-Payne, Randolph-Hazel Park, Ft. Snelling-Maria, Dale St. and Snelling Ave.. After turning onto Marshall Ave., the Selby-Lake streetcar crossed the old, narrow Marshall-Lake Street Bridge across the Mississippi River back into Minneapolis.

Into Minneapolis, the Selby-Lake car crossed the Plymouth-East 25th St., Minnehaha-Ft. Snelling, 34th Ave. S.-N. Washington and 28th Ave. S. streetcar lines before reaching our original transfer point at Lake & Bloomington for the final leg home to 44th St. Thus, the four of us spent a good part of this day riding the rails for a nominal sum of less than \$3.

Nicollet Station

Another memory was riding my bike all the way over to 31st & Nicollet to see a Minneapolis Millers baseball game at Nicollet Park. They had "Knothole Days" on Saturday afternoons where all kids got in free. Of course, I always checked out the streetcar activity in the adjacent busy Nicollet Station across 31st Street behind the ballpark. Extra streetcars were always put on the lines following the end of the game.

If we were lucky, we could ride a

"through" streetcar for a night game at Nicollet Park from our house that was deadheading to Nicollet Station after a rush hour run. No transferring at Bloomington & Lake necessary!.

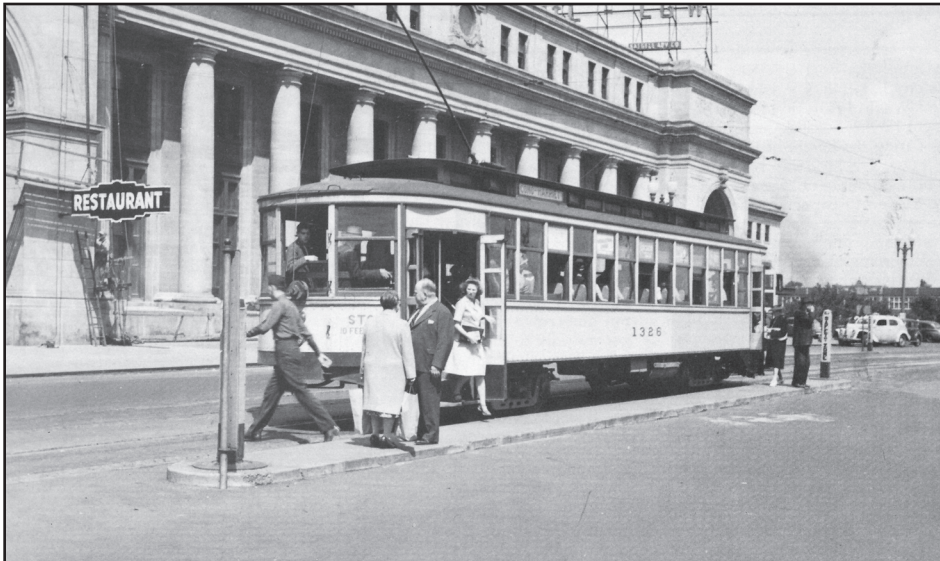
The Beginning of the End

I still remember the very sad day in early 1952 when I was 14 that I first heard that the streetcar company was going to replace all the streetcars with buses. TCRT announced that they would perform this conversion in just 25 months. And they did. I couldn't believe it! I thought at the time that we would see streetcars forever. I could never imagine that at the time we were still completely surrounded with streetcar lines. They had been running past our house for the past seven years since we moved here in 1945. I couldn't imagine a bus running past our house! That's something we only saw on 38th St. or Franklin Ave.

But it did happen. We learned a few months later that our Bloomington-Columbia Heights line was going to be one of the first Minneapolis lines to make the switch. I heard that St. Paul had several lines converted already.

During the final days of streetcar service, I took my Kodak Brownie Hawkeye camera across the street from my house and got pictures of standard 1-man/2-man car 1246 and PCC car 341 in front of my house as they dropped off passengers.

The conversion from streetcars to buses on the Bloomington-Columbia Heights line happened overnight on February 21, 1953. The day before abandonment, I watched every streetcar pass by our house knowing that was indeed the end. It just so happened that there was a snowstorm the night of the conversion. The next morning, I awoke to the muffled sound of old Mack buses starting up



A Como-Harriet car works the Great Northern depot. See the inside front cover also.



A streetcar unloads in front of Fred's boyhood home at 44th and Bloomington. Fred Rhodes photo.

from the car stop in front of our house. Some of our neighbors hadn't heard about the conversion and thought the buses were running as temporary replacements for the streetcars because of the snow.

TCRT was in such a hurry to convert streetcars to buses that they hadn't waited for the fleet of 500 new GM diesel buses to arrive yet. They were building up their expanding fleet of buses with loads of used Mack buses (purchased second-hand from Texas I heard at the time). And those are what replaced the streetcars on our line.

After the snow melted, passengers were met with the truth. Suddenly,

passengers were riding on old, rough-riding steel-sprung vehicles on our rough street after being used to riding on velvet smooth-riding PCC cars. "This is progress?!" they said. It was a tough adjustment for everyone.

A few months later, I saw a TCRT line truck slowly go by our house, with workers cutting down the overhead wires, rolling them up and stuffing them into another truck. A little later, I saw another truck come by, wrap a large strap around the middle of the bell-top wire poles, pull them up from the grassy boulevard and pile them into the truck.

The tracks, however, lasted a lot

longer. The rails weren't paved over until 1957, four years after abandonment, during a major road project when the city also replaced curbs and gutters. Some tracks are still there, under about four inches of asphalt.

After the February 21, 1953 conversion of the Bloomington-Columbia Heights streetcar line, to get my streetcar fix, I would ride the bus to Lake St., then transfer to the Selby-Lake and Chicago-Penn-Fremont or Como-Oak-Harriet streetcars to get downtown.

Of course, that also was short-lived. Both the Selby-Lake and Chicago-Penn-Fremont streetcar lines were converted to bus just five months later, on July 10, 1953. For some reason, these two busy lines never had PCC service.

By then, the first of the new red, cream and blue GM Model TDH 5105 buses had arrived to take the place of the streetcars and started appearing on the Bloomington-Columbia Heights line as well. The newer and older, smaller Mack buses were now relegated to rush hour service, along with a few White Motor Co. buses. These buses were then repainted from their standard green, charcoal and white colors to match the new GM buses.

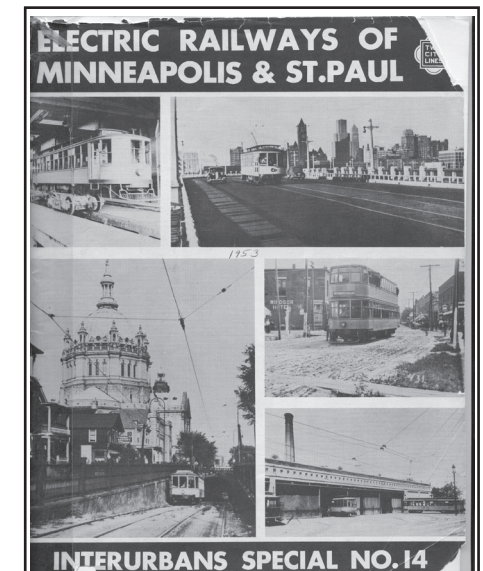
Then it would be almost another year until the final abandonments of the Como- Oak-Harriet lines on June 18, 1954. Before that happened though, as a movie buff, I got my first job working as an usher at the opulent State Theatre at 8th and Hennepin in downtown Minneapolis. I started working there in April 1954, just two months before the end of streetcar operations.

One of my duties was to collect tickets in the lobby at the front of the theatre where I could clearly see through the front doors and gaze out at the traffic on Hennepin Ave. That included watching the parade of Como-Harriet

and Oak-Harriet streetcars making their final runs. The cars were all the standard 1-man/2-man variety by then as the 2-man gate cars all had long been replaced by PCC cars. The PCC cars, in turn, now also were gone, having recently been sold off to Newark, Cleveland and Mexico City.

I took note of the streetcar numbers and only saw about 40 or so cars handling the rail traffic for these last two months of streetcar service. It dawned on me then that those hundreds of streetcars I had seen since 1945 were now gone for good. After work, I would ride one of those cars home, via transfers to buses at Lake St. and Bloomington Ave.

It was at about this time when the first bible of Twin City Lines streetcars, Interurbans Special No. 14: Electric Railways of Minneapolis & St. Paul, was published. The book was co-authored by MSM members, Russell L. Olson and Edwin H. Nelson, and printed in December 1953. I received my copy in April 1954 and quickly read it while streetcars were still in operation! The book answered many



questions about the streetcar system in my years growing up. I still refer to it to this day.

Riding the Inter-Campus Special

The week before the abandonment of the streetcar system, I rode streetcars as often as I could. I rode the full length of each line, including one line I had never ridden – the Inter-Campus Special. This line ran the 2 1/2 miles between the U of M main campus at 4th St. and 15th Ave. SE. in Minneapolis and the U of M agricultural campus in St. Paul. It ran mostly

on single track right of way.

For most of its existence, the Inter-Campus Special operated using four to six consecutively numbered streetcars, rented from TCRT. It was the last line to operate gate cars (numbered 1266-1271) after all other TCRT lines converted to 1-man operation. However, in the last year of streetcar operation, this line used standard cars 1301-1304, but in a 2-man configuration, with a conductor.

The day I rode, I boarded steel-sided car 1304 in the Minneapolis main campus and rode it round trip to the St.

Paul agricultural campus and back. It was a unique experience riding a streetcar in 'open country' as opposed to city streets.

My final rides on the streetcar system were on June 18, 1954, the last day of streetcar operation in the Twin Cities before conversion to buses at midnight. I rode with a fellow Roosevelt High School classmate and Minnesota Railfans Association (MRA) member, Jim Bertrand. Thanks to him, I was not only able to ride on these few selected lines that night, but also the Last Streetcar Ride special the next day, June 19, 1954, sponsored by the MRA.

We rode various streetcars on the Como-Harriet and Oak-Harriet lines that afternoon and evening until late in the night. It was a fun, but sad evening. I failed to write down the streetcar numbers on which we rode. I wasn't on the final streetcar either (car 1166), that pulled into East Side Station after midnight.

The Last Streetcar Ride – MRA Railfans Special – June 19, 1954

The MRA chartered two standard 1-man/2-man streetcars for an all-day ride on all remaining electrified trackage the day after abandonment, Saturday, June 19, 1954. About 100 railfans gathered at East Side Station at 10 a.m. for a ride that would last until about 5 p.m. The cars selected for this last ride were wood-sided car 1300 and steel-sided car 1775, which had last run in regular service on the Como-Harriet line.

I was disappointed that gate car 1269 wasn't selected as one of the cars since it was used frequently on MRA fan trips, most recently after the abandonment of the Glenwood-4th Avenue line in March.

On this final streetcar day, I grabbed

my Kodak Brownie Hawkeye camera and two rolls of black-and-white film and went over to East Side Station at 10 a.m. for that last ride. The tour was scheduled to run until 5 p.m.

The all-day ride ticket cost just \$2, an absolute steal even for 1954, which included a box lunch at Lake Harriet Station. Seats were not assigned, so people were free to ride where they wanted on either car. I switched back and forth between cars during the day, which included numerous photo stops.

Photo stops included the Como-Harriet streetcar bridge over 36th Street by Lake Calhoun, Washington Avenue at the University of Minnesota under the two pedestrian bridges, and the ends of various streetcar lines, including at Brookside Ave. (Como-Harriet line) and at Snelling Station.

We rode the Inter-campus Special and Como-Harriet lines once or twice, making our hour-long lunch stop at the Linden Hills Depot at 42nd & Queen by Lake Harriet. It seemed strange to see cars 1300 and 1775 sit in front of the station for an hour without worry about blocking other streetcar traffic. It also seemed strange riding around the Twin Cities all day without spotting another streetcar, something that had never happened before.

The streetcars went wherever riders wanted them to go, without following a planned route. After lunch the streetcars headed east on Washington Avenue, through the U of M, and onto University Avenue into St. Paul and into the yards at Snelling Station.

While running on a seldom-used track at the station, car 1775 jumped the track. Rather than just grab another streetcar to take us back to East Side Station, they worked for a while to rerail the car. While they were doing that, riders made an impromptu decision to roam around the yards and



While working as a ticket collector at the State Theater, Fred watched the last two months of streetcar service on Hennepin Avenue and took this photo.

TROLLEY AU REVOIR
Traversing

ALL REMAINING STREET CAR LINES OPERATED BY
Minneapolis Street Railway Co.
St. Paul City Railway Co.

Sponsored by Minnesota Railfans' Assn.

Saturday
JUNE 19, 1954

From East Mpls. Sta. { Leave 10 A.M.
Return 5 P.M.

OAK HARRIET COMO HARRIET—BROOKSIDE
UNIVERSITY INTERCAMPUS
—also—
FIRST AVENUE NORTH

2 cars used—
1300 ACCESS LINE to SNELLING SHOPS, ST. PAUL
& Via WASHINGTON & UNIVERSITY AVES.
1775. Last regular passenger runs cease Midnight, June 18th

Lake Harriet
Lunch Stop

82

☐ Adults - \$ 2.00
☐ Children - \$ 1.00



take a last look at the 30-40 or so remaining streetcars waiting to be scrapped.

Before long, people boarded the cars and started removing souvenir items such as destination signs, answer bells, sign boards, seat handles and other hardware that could be removed easily with a screwdriver. I got my share of items and have since donated them to MSM.

A sense of sadness overcame us as streetcars 1300 and 1775 headed back to East Side Station for the last time. The ride was over. Everything was all over. We would never experience this joy of riding streetcars all over the Twin Cities ever again.

We disembarked, looked at the streetcars for the last time and went home. We didn't think we would ever see them again. At least I didn't hear about any effort to save a streetcar for posterity. It was a joyous day and a sad one as well. I'm glad I was part of it. That day has lived with me for the last 65+ years and will last forever.

Visit to Snelling Station After Abandonment

After the end of streetcar operations, I returned to Snelling Station to take one last look at the rolling stock in the yards before they disappeared for good. I didn't see any scrapping of the streetcars going on, but I observed a few rows of them waiting for their final demise. In particular, I wanted to take a last look at any gate cars remaining as they were my favorites.

I saw only three gate cars (1266, 1269 & 1270) in the yard, lined up together on their own siding (see car 1270 on page 23). They were part of the

Fred with car 1300 at East Side Station before the last day trip. Fred Rhodes collection.

final group of gate cars (1266-1271) that operated on the Inter-Campus Special line from 1947 to 1953. All other gate cars had long since been scrapped, dating back to the arrival of the PCC cars in the late 1940s. They literally were scrapped one-for-one with the arrival of 141 PCC cars.

I checked the three gate cars over and took some pictures. Car 1266 is noteworthy in the fact that it was the first streetcar built at the new Snelling Shops at Snelling & University in St. Paul in 1907. Previous cars were built at the Nicollet Shops at 31st & Nicollet in Minneapolis.

Gate car 1269 was sitting alone in the weeds behind the other two gate cars. Souvenir hunters already claimed its headlight. The destination sign was turned to Bloomington-Columbia Heights. Who could have done that?!

Car 1269 was used in many MRA fan trips right up until abandonment, most recently after the conversion of the Glenwood-4th Avenue line in March 1954, three months previous.

Three of the Inter-Campus gate cars, 1267, 1268 and 1271, were missing. I learned later that:

Car 1271 had been scrapped in 1953 soon after being retired from the Inter-Campus.

Car 1267 had been donated in 1953 to the Seashore Trolley Museum in Kennebunkport, Maine.

Car 1268 had been donated in 1953 to Sacred Heart Catholic School in Robbinsdale for static display (sans trucks) in the playground. Eventually, the car was vandalized and removed from the schoolyard and scrapped.

Years after the TCRT Streetcars

I fulfilled a childhood ambition of running a streetcar when I joined the Minnesota Transportation Museum in 1977 and operated TCRT 1300, DSR 265 and 78 for 20 years.



The Bloomington Avenue line

Fred Rhodes lived on the Bloomington Avenue line. It ran the length of Bloomington Avenue from Franklin Avenue to 54th Street, where the street ended at Lake Nokomis Park. From Franklin north it took a twisting route to the corner of 4th Street and 2nd Avenue South. From there it turned north to head for Columbia Heights. That caused it to miss the center of downtown some important transfer points by several blocks.

The line started with horsecars in 1878. It was extended in stages, finally reaching 32nd Street in 1888.

It was electrified in 1891, and the new 60-car Bloomington Station opened at 32nd Street, along with a short non-revenue track connection along 32nd to Cedar Avenue. It was replaced in 1910 by the much larger, fireproof Lake Street Station. You can recognize the site today by the stuccoed walk-up apartment buildings that replaced it.

The line was extended south as the area developed. It reached 34th Street in 1905, 38th Street in 1911 and 48th Street in 1922.

TCRT sometimes made routing mistakes and one of them happened beginning in 1921. Bloomington and Cedar Avenues are only a quarter mile (4 short blocks) apart, less than the usual 6-8 block spacing and it reduces ridership on both lines. In 1921 the

Cedar Avenue line was extended to 52nd Street, where the street meets Lake Nokomis. In 1925 it was extended west on 52nd Street to Bloomington Avenue.

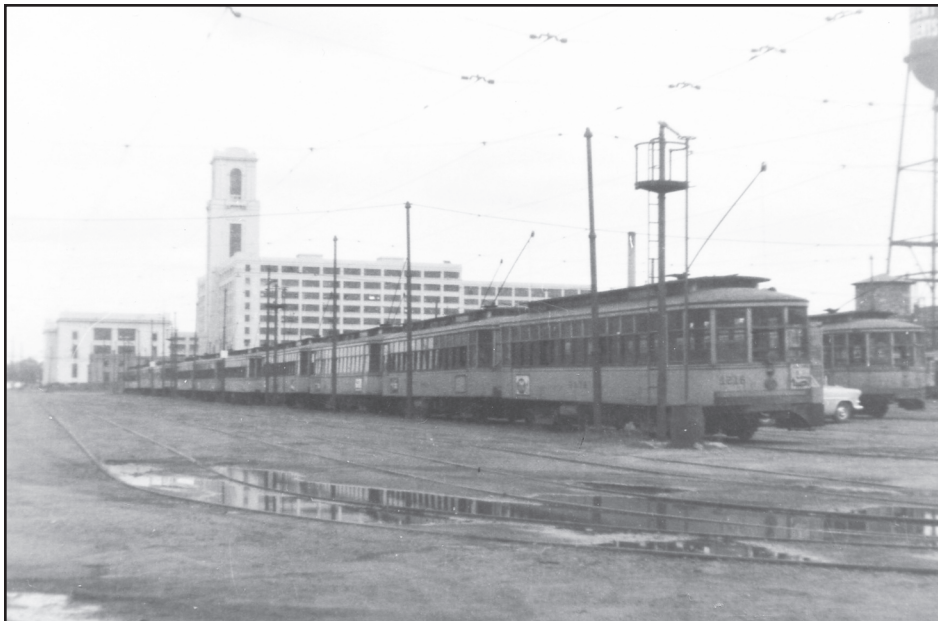
A year later in 1926 an entire new branch was built on 42nd Street from Cedar to 34th Avenue S. to serve the neighborhood east of Lake Nokomis. Now the Cedar Avenue line had three branches. Creating a reasonable frequency for all three resulted in too much service on the main stem.

That lasted until 1928. The Bloomington line was extended from 48th Street across Minnehaha Creek to 52nd Street and the 52nd Street leg of the Cedar line was abandoned. The next year Cedar Avenue south of 42nd Street was converted to a shuttle. Even that was unsustainable and the Cedar shuttle was abandoned in 1933. That same year the final Bloomington Avenue extension was completed to 54th Street. It was the last Twin Cities streetcar extension until Nicollet Avenue reached 62nd Street in 1947.

Starting in 1950, the gradual abandonment of certain lines impacted the Bloomington line. TCRT vacated the problematic intersection of Franklin Avenue and Cedar Avenue, detouring via Lake Street to Bloomington Avenue to Franklin.

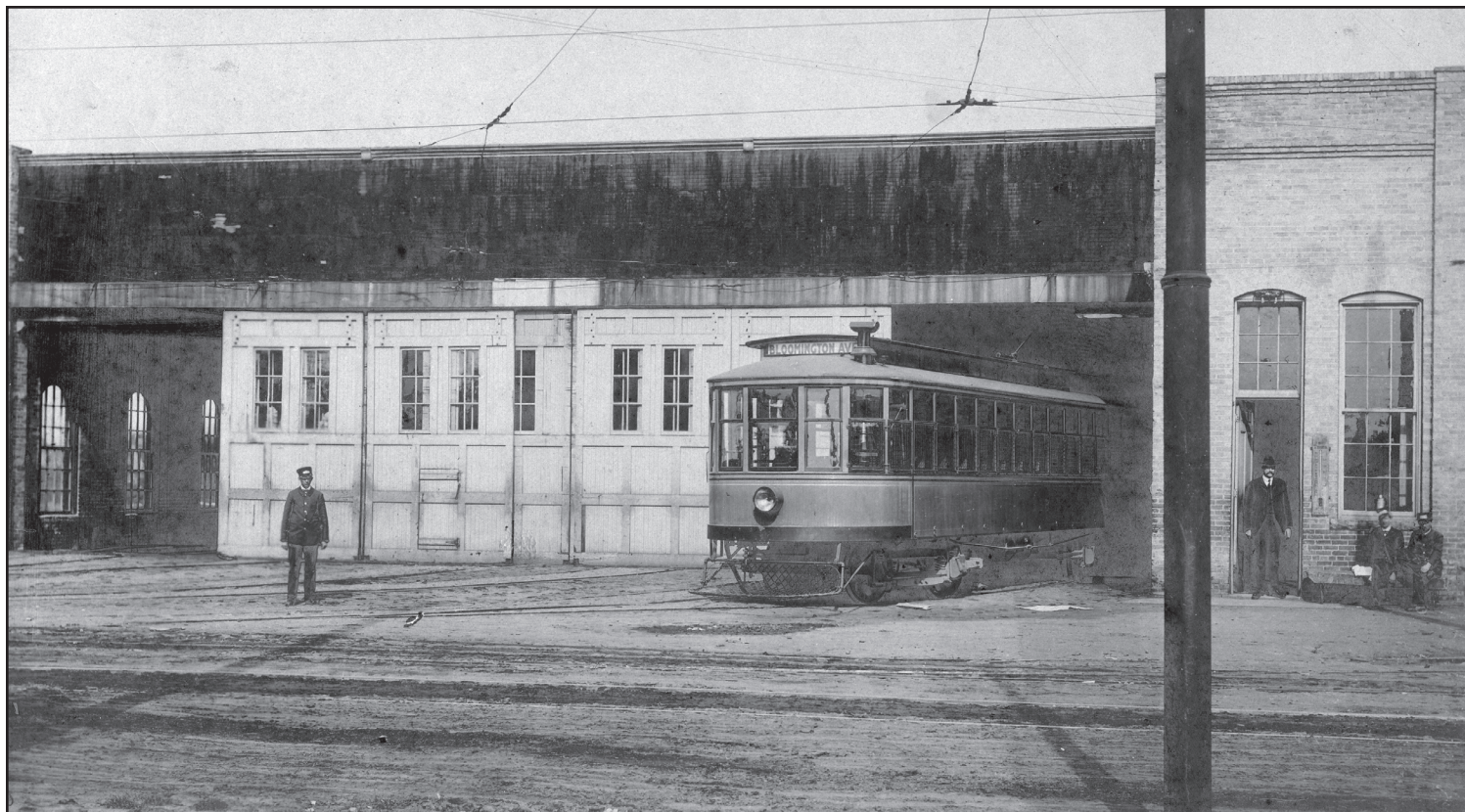
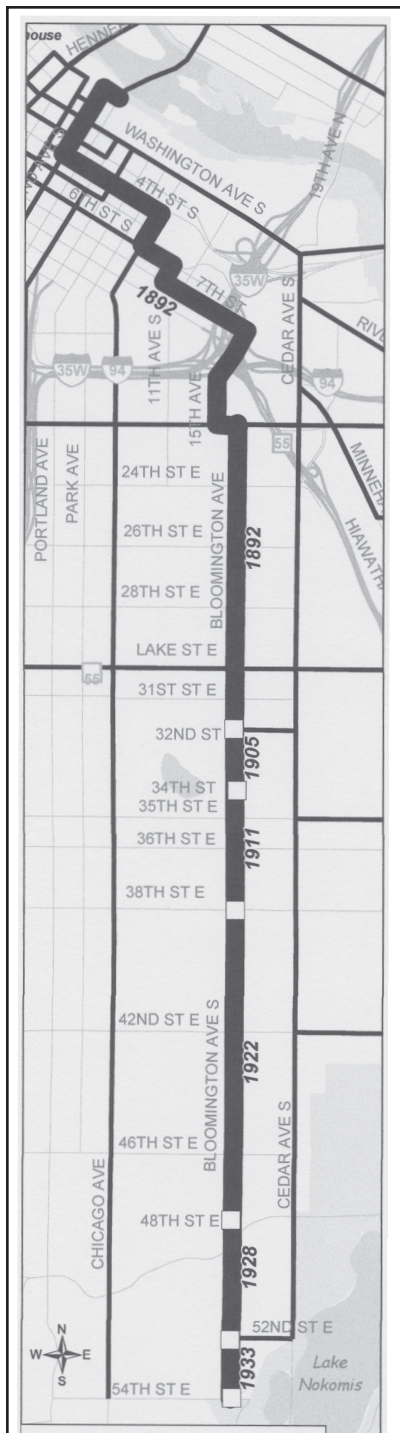
The Bloomington line from Franklin to downtown was removed in 1952. Bloomington was rerouted via Franklin to 4th Avenue S., 6th Street and 2nd Avenue S., rejoining the original route at 4th Street. In 1952 the track on the 3rd Avenue bridge across the Mississippi was removed, and to Bloomington-Columbia heights cars crossed the river on Hennepin Avenue.

Final abandonment of the line came on February 21, 1953.



Above left: Fred on gate car 1266 at Snelling Station after abandonment. Fred Rhodes collection.

Below left: The Snelling Station yard after abandonment. Fred Rhodes photo.



Early years: Until 1911 the line ended at 32nd Street and the Bloomington Station, which housed 60 cars. It was replaced in 1910 by the larger fire-proof Lake Street Station.

This group shot was posed in front of the station in 1892. Note the circular number badges, brass hat badges and inconsistent hat styles. H. B. Herrington photo, Southern California Railway Museum collection.



Now we'll follow the line from the south end at 54th Street to downtown.

Top left: Sitting in the north-facing wye track at 54th.

Top right: Starting the wye movement by turning right onto 54th. Ed Nelson photo.

Right: Approaching 54th Street from the north. Bill Olsen photo.





Lower left: In the mid-1920s development began to leap Minnehaha Creek and the Bloomington line made the crossing in 1928, stopping at 52nd Street.

Upper left: 1933 saw the last track extension in the system until 1947. That's Lake Nokomis at far left. Both Star-Tribune photos, Minnesota Historical Society collection



Above center: The camera looks south on Bloomington at the crossing of Minnehaha Creek. Note the switch for the 48th Street wye in the foreground.

Above right: Looking south on Bloomington at 36th Street in 1914. The street is about to be paved and the track will have to be rebuilt. Hibbard photo for TCRT.

Lower right: 1950 saw the rerouting of the 34th Avenue S. line via Lake Street and Bloomington to avoid the Franklin & Cedar intersection. That required building west-to-north and south-to-east track connections at Lake & Bloomington.

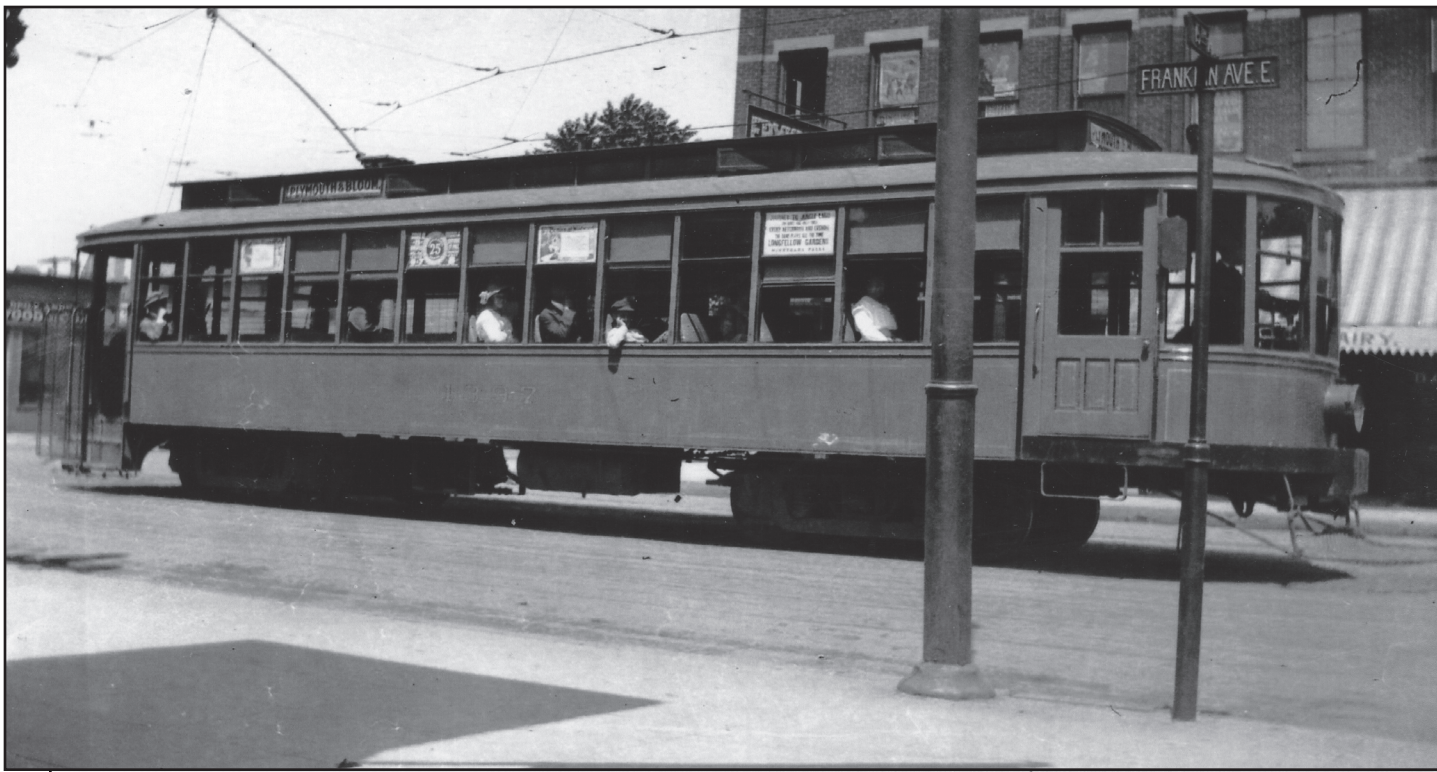


Top left: Rebuilding the track in anticipation of paving is underway in 1914 in the 2600 block of Bloomington. Note the temporary track at far right. Hibbard photo for TCRT.

Below left: Here's the same location in 1953, only looking north instead of south. You can see the same church in both photos. Today the steeped sanctuary has been replaced by a new, lower building and it's a mosque. Ed Nelson photo.

Below right: Something bad has happened to this southbound car while turning from Franklin onto Bloomington. Star-Tribune photo, Minnesota Historical Society collection.





Top: This rare pre-1920 photo shows a Bloomington car on Franklin Avenue. It has just turned off 15th Avenue and in a short half block will turn right onto Bloomington. Rudolph Gustafson photo, Dick Gustafson collection

Bottom: An unknown blockage has immobilized the Bloomington-Columbia Heights line on Chicago Avenue at 4th Street. At left is the Rock Island freight house, now the site of US Bank Stadium. Star-Tribune photo, Minnesota Historical Society collection.





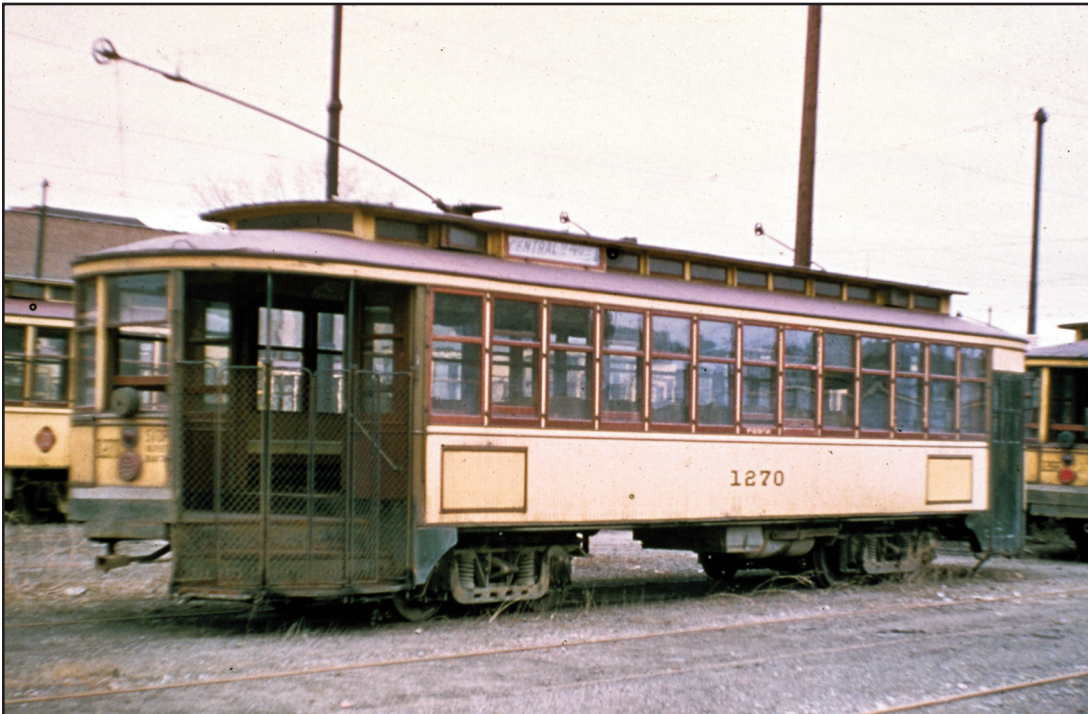
Viewed from Marquette Avenue, a Bloomington-Columbia Heights car turns from 4th Street onto 2nd Avenue S. Joseph Zalusky photo, Hennepin County Library collection.



This is 2nd Avenue S., looking north from 4th Street. The streetcar in the previous photo was on the curving track. Joseph Zalusky photo, Hennepin County Library collection.



After his train ride from Minneapolis to St. Paul, Fred exited the St. Paul Union Depot and boarded a Selby-Lake car on 4th Street to return to Minneapolis.



Above left and right: Fred was intrigued by car 1136, the last in the fleet to retain its original double stream gates and motorman's door. Equipped with telephones and desks, it was only used as the State Fair supervisors' office. The rest of the year it sat at Snelling Station next to University Avenue. Bill Olsen photos.

Left: Car 1270 was one of the six gate cars (1266-1271) assigned to the Inter-Campus line until 1953. They were fantrip favorites. Car 1267 was donated to Seashore Trolley Museum.



Car 1775, accompanied by car 1300, was chartered by the Minnesota Railfans Association for the last fantrip on June 19, 1954, the day after the streetcars were abandoned. Here it crosses Minnehaha Creek in Edina, on the return trip from the Brookside loop.



MINNESOTA STREETCAR MUSEUM

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August 2021

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